

Silvia Kolbowski. *Model Pleasure, Part 7*, 1984. Black-and-white photograph, 25 x 35" (63.5 x 90 cm).  
(Photo: courtesy the artist)

# Representation and Sexuality

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## **Over the past decade there has occurred, across a body of dis-**

courses, a significant shift in the way we conceive of the text. The demise of the author as transcendent self or bearer of meaning has borne along a rejection of the text as discrete or self-contained object; attention has been focused, instead, on a model that poses meaning as constructed in the discourses that articulate it, in an interactive context of reader and text. Against the expressionist model, based on an expressive self and an empathic reader, who reduplicates preconstituted meanings, recent theory has proposed a reader who is positioned to receive and construct the text, a historically formed reader shaped in and through language. The shift is hardly unprecedented: it was in the thirties, after all, that Brecht insisted on the work's incompleteness without the viewer's active participation, and on the determining role of social conditions in the process of meaning production.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the direction merely confirms an age-old awareness that texts "read" differently at different periods, according to the discursive formations in effect. They are dependent for meaning on given conditions of reception, on relations of context and use, on social formations that are laid into place—on what Hans Robert Jauss has referred to as the "horizon of reception of the audience."<sup>2</sup> It is ideology's work that fixes such meanings as timeless and immutable, above the field of material conditions, rather than as shifting, in process. The movement from analysis of artistic

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1. See Sylvia Harvey, "Whose Brecht? Memories for the Eighties," *Screen* 23, no. 1 (May-June 1982): 55-56, for a discussion of Brecht and reader-text relations in general. Throughout this essay, my analysis is informed by a variety of sources of which the most central are Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, editors and translators, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École freudienne* (London: R. W. Norton, 1982); Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Judith Mayne's several essays in *New German Critique* and the photographic criticism of Victor Burgin, notably as collected in Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982).

2. Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

products toward consideration of the production of meaning, then, can be seen to stem from awareness that consumption completes production—that there is, in any discursive situation, a “reader in the text.”

The term “reader” could be replaced by “viewer,” just as “text” could be exchanged for “photograph,” “film,” “advertisement,” or any other cultural form whose circulation produces meanings. For what has become apparent is the role of these varied representations, founded on but not identical to language, in constructing what we know as reality. Since reality can be known only through the forms that articulate it, there can be no reality outside of representation. With its synonyms, truth and meaning, it is a fiction produced by its cultural representations, a construction discursively shaped and solidified through repetition. And this process by which reality is defined as an effect of signification has tremendous import for that necessary reader, or subject, implicated in its web.

Indeed, critical discussion has come to view as the correlate of this cultural formation of reality that social relations and the available forms of subjectivity are produced in and by representation. It has become axiomatic that questions of signification cannot be divided from questions of subjectivity, from the processes by which viewing subjects are *caught up in*, *formed by*, and *construct* meanings. Central among these is the process of suturing, by which the subject is “bound in” to the representation,<sup>3</sup> filling its constitutive absence or gap so as to complete the production of meaning. In this manner, the subject is the constant point of appropriation by the discourse and, in this sense, all representation can be said to entail subject positioning; the subject is at once placed in, or by, the discourse and constructed in, or by, the discourse. However, since the fabrication of reality depends on repetition to fix or stabilize meanings, most texts within cultural circulation serve to confirm and reduplicate subject positions. Representation, hardly neutral, acts to regulate and define the subjects it addresses, positioning them by class or by sex, in active or passive relations to meaning. Over time these fixed positions acquire the status of identities and, in their broadest reach, of categories. Hence the forms of discourse are at once forms of definition, means of limitation, modes of power.

The most impressive recent work concerning subjectivity has confronted a notorious absence—the question of sexuality. Examining its relation to questions of meaning and language, this work has exposed the way in which dominant discourses (and indeed, the discourses of supposedly neutral institutions) address spectators as gendered subjects, at once positioning and constructing subjectivity and securing patriarchal organization. What is at issue is a critique of patriarchy which, Freud noted, is equivalent to human civilization.<sup>4</sup> For it is patriarchal relations that set the terms for the forms of subjectiv-

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3. For the central discussion on suturing attention is directed to Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981) and Stephen Heath and Teresa de Lauretis, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980). For an attack on Heath's formulations that draws heavily on the concept of suture, see Noël Carroll, “Address to the Heathen,” *October*, no. 23 (Winter 1982): 89-163.

4. See Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

ity available in reader-text relations,<sup>5</sup> serving to ratify existing interests and echoing a history of feminine oppression. Throughout representation there are abundant—even preponderant—forms in which the apparatus works to constitute the subject as male, denying subjectivity to woman. Woman, within this structure, is unauthorized, illegitimate: she does not represent but is, rather, represented. Placed in a passive rather than active role, as object rather than subject, she is the constant point of masculine appropriation in a society in which representation is empowered to construct identity.

The visual material garnered through this project offers ample evidence of the controlling of feminine sexuality. Consider, for example, women's subordination to reproduction, to the family, and to the masculine libidinal economy as advanced through advertising and TV. Or consider the deployment of the fashion model as an idealized image for the male gaze, or for woman's narcissistic identification. Cinema studies have attended to the use of stars and stereotypes and to the function, in narrative, of these passive signs of masculine desire. This constitution of identity such that man is viewer, woman viewed, and the viewing process a mode of domination and control<sup>6</sup> has been applied to the tradition of the female nude; art history has turned, although belatedly, to confront the marginalization of women and the definition of creativity as male.<sup>7</sup> What we are given, then, is abundant evidence of a masculine ideal that directs and reinforces behavior; one which, by posing as a norm, impels adaptation to a constructed situation. Thus, "framed" against this background, women have begun to argue against the truth or reality of sexuality to interrogate the role of representation in their oppression.

This perspective is corroborated by Jacques Lacan, who remarked in 1958 that "images and symbols *for* the woman cannot be isolated from images and symbols *of* the woman. . . . It is representation, the representation of feminine sexuality . . . which conditions how it comes into play."<sup>8</sup> Woman is placed, and learns to take her (negative) place, according to it. For this reason, sexual difference should not be seen as a function of gender—as a pre-given or biological identity, as in the somatic model—but as a historical formation, continually produced, reproduced and rigidified in signifying practices. As Stephen Heath has written, sexuality is *in consequence of* the Symbolic.<sup>9</sup> And it is ideology, working through repetition, identification, and the illusionism

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5. See Kuhn, *Women's Pictures*, *passim*, for a discussion of this topic.

6. A reversal of the terms applied in an example in Judith Mayne, "The Woman at the Keyhole: Women's Cinema and Feminist Criticism," *New German Critique*, no. 23 (Spring-Summer 1981): 31.

7. For a re-examination of art history's absences and the strategies underlying them, see Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

8. Jacques Lacan, "Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality" (1958), reprinted in Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, pp. 86-98; other quotations from Lacan in this essay are drawn from *Ecrits: A Selection*, edited by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock and New York: Norton, 1975).

9. Stephen Heath, *The Sexual Fix* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982), p. 154.



characterizing bourgeois society that naturalizes its cultural and variable categories as immutable essences or truths.

The prevalence of these images, their power in prescribing subject positions, and their use in constructing identity within the patriarchal order indicate that an exemplary political practice should take as its terrain representation, working to challenge its oppressive structures. However, these discoveries have also revealed the inadequacy of the equal rights or gender equity strategies that informed cultural politics of the seventies. These strategies, based in the elimination of discrimination and in equal access to institutional power, in no way attempt to account for the ideological structures of which discrimination is but a symptom; as Jane Gallop observes, they aim to recover, in the direction of complementarity and symmetry, the structured appropriation of woman to the order of the same, to the standard of masculine sexuality.<sup>10</sup> They leave untouched, in this manner, the integrated value system through which feminine oppression is enacted. And it is with the aim of understanding the construction of sexed subjectivity so as to disarm the positioning of the phallogocentric order that artists have turned to psychoanalysis.

But to psychoanalytic theory of a very particular kind. The model to which contemporary practice has turned is not that of twenties-thirties theory, based on genital identity and "natural" preference, and directed toward patterns of normative sexuality. The trend comprised by Horney, Jones, and a host of other analysts, which conceived of a potentially unified subject channeled, through analysis, into conformity with society's codes, has been countered by one primed against this humanist conception. The latter model conceives of a human subject in process, in perpetual formation; it is one that views the unconscious and sexuality as constructed through language, through modes of representation that characterize our relation with others. Sexuality, in this approach, cannot be understood outside of the symbolic structures that articulate it, and prescribe society's laws. The model employs what is most forceful in Freud's theory—his analysis of the construction of the psychological categories of sexuality—using the sciences of linguistics and semiotics that were unavailable to him. It is generally associated with the radical rereading of Freud undertaken by Lacan.

In surveying the way in which such questions are addressed it is important to grasp the basis of this theory, for its pivotal terms recur throughout the artists' work, much as Lacan's late writings, with their stress on the fantasy construct of woman, provide a framework for recent political practice. What has been accomplished in recent years is a displacement of previous biologicistic and reductionistic readings of Freud in favor of a radically contemporary model. Central to this process are Freud's statements on the psychological structures of sexuality—as opposed to anatomical difference—and on the intrinsic bisexuality of "the sexes." Resisting the notions of "masculine" and "fem-

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10. Gallop, *Daughter's Seduction*, offers a remarkable discussion of this failing. See, in particular, Chapter 2; see also Parker and Pollock for a discussion of equal access strategies.

inine" ("among the most confused that occur in science"), Freud was to argue for "active" and "passive" relations, connecting sexuality to the *situation* of the subject."<sup>11</sup> The role of "places," here, is essential, for sexuality is determined by the direction of the drive, a drive that oscillates, historically, between both. This mobility is confirmed in actual observation which, Freud writes in a footnote added to *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in 1915,

*. . . shows that in human beings pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found either in a psychological or a biological sense. Every individual on the contrary displays a mixture of the character traits belonging to his own and to the opposite sex; and he shows a combination of activity and passivity whether or not these last character-traits tally with his biological ones.*<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, "pure masculinity or femininity" can only be conventionally assigned, as meanings determined by the social order.

Freud and, after him, Lacan, were to find the key to "socio-sexual" identity in the presence or absence of the penis; in a critical moment before the Oedipal state, the child's look establishes its mother, or another, as without a penis, as lacking the masculine organ and inherently "less than" the male. This absence, which structures woman as castrated within the patriarchal order, is based on the privileging of vision over other senses, but what saves the concept from anatomical determinism is its reference to an existing system of meaning. For, as has been noted, "the presence or absence of a penis . . . is only important insofar as it signifies, insofar as it already has meaning within a particular formation of sexual difference."<sup>13</sup> The cultural formation of patriarchy prescribes in advance such sexual positions, ascribing the penis as that to which value accrues and its absence as . . . lack. Lacan goes beyond Freud, describing the penis as the inadequate physical stand-in for the phallus, the privileged signifier in our society. The phallus, in his system, is the mark around which subjectivity, social law, and the acquisition of language turn; human sexuality is assigned and consequently, lived, according to the position one assumes as either having or not having the phallus and with it, access to its symbolic structures. In this manner the Freudian notion of the look is rewritten, establishing the possession or lack of the penis as prototypical for language as the play of presence and absence as differential articulation. Within this structure the phallus assumes the role of a signifier or bearer of meaning, in relation to its absence, to lack. The latter position is occupied by the girl-child, who can thus be said to hold a gender-specific, and inherently problematic, relation to language in the phallogocentric order. By demonstrating the way

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11. See Heath, *Sexual Fix*, Chapter 9 for an excellent study of the concept of bisexuality in Freud.

12. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), vol. 7, p. 220.

13. Gallop, *Daughter's Seduction*, *passim*.

in which absence serves to assert and reinforce the power of presence, the Lacanian system indicates something of the problem of woman, constructed as a category around the phallic term.

What is offered in this Freud-employed-by-Lacan is a differential account of sexuality, refuting the fixity of biological oppositions. A central role in this argument is accorded to looking, to otherness, for identity is constructed only through images acquired from elsewhere. Lacan firmly states that sexuality is not an absolute or "signified" but, rather, the *effect* of a signifier, derived from external social determinations. The foundation of his theory is that the human subject is formed in language, by a series of divisions that constitute sexed subjectivity and whose repressions comprise the unconscious. Central among these is the Oedipus complex, which serves to place the child within the social and sexual structures of patriarchy. For Freud and Lacan, it is through the Oedipus complex that the order structuring society is internalized; as Juliet Mitchell has written, the Oedipus complex implies that "the reproduction of the ideology of human society is thus assured in the acquisition of the law by each individual."<sup>14</sup>

The Lacanian version of the Oedipus complex entails a rewriting of the Freudian myth according to a linguistic model, by which the son assumes the Name of the Father, insuring the perpetuation of patriarchal culture through control over its symbolic structures. For this model, Lacan draws on Freud's account of Oedipal positioning. According to this account, both boy-child and girl-child initially share the same history, a bisexual history prior to the fixing of gender identity. Both share as object of desire their mother, which is equivalent, in fantasy, to having the phallus that is the object of the mother's desire.<sup>15</sup> This phallic phase, moored in the illusion of sexual completeness, is ended by the incest prohibition instituted in the Name of the Father; thus the father represents the intervention of culture to break up the "natural" biological dyad, acting to repress desire through threat of castration. According to a successful Oedipal resolution each child will choose as love object a member of the opposite sex and identify with one of the same: in this sense, sexuality can be seen as the displaced, and retrospectively deferred, *consequence* of this early action. Threatened by castration, the boy will transfer his Oedipal love for his mother onto another feminine subject, while the girl will transfer her love to her father, who appears to have the phallus, identifying with her mother, who has not. The girl will struggle to "have" the phallus, instituting the play of heterosexual sexuality (that culminates in the phallic substitute of the child), while the boy will work to "represent" it. The desires of the Oedipus complex are repressed into the unconscious, and of these the central, significant one—the object of primal repression—is the phallic mother herself. Hence meaning, or a "place" in patriarchal structure, is attained only at the price of the lost

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14. Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 413.

15. My discussion of the Oedipal complex is taken almost entirely and quite "to the letter" from Mitchell's excellent resumé. Particularly pertinent to the topic of this essay is her treatment of the male child's "struggle to represent" the phallus, Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 7.

object. Castration consists of the surrender of satisfaction *necessary* to assume sexual identity.<sup>16</sup> It is in this lack, the effect of a primordial absence (the dyadic union with the mother) that Lacan bases the instigation of desire, which is distinguished from want in that its satisfaction is never attained. Desire, then, is deviation; it is ex-centric, constantly "forced away from the aim and into displacements."<sup>17</sup>

According to Lacan, the castration complex ". . . has the function of a knot . . . in . . . the installation in the subject of an unconscious position" that predisposes future identifications. It provides a structural account of how the subject becomes securely placed in patriarchy, assuming an identity as "he" or "she" that serves to represent its sexuality. Sexual difference can be seen to be assigned and structured through language, operating in the Name of the Father; for this reason, it operates in the register of the symbolic, leading to the interminable circulation of institutionalized identities, of psychic categories of sexuality, founded on primal repression.

Phallic castration, however, is but the central instance of this subjection to external law. Parturition and loss thread their way through subjectivity, through the positioning of sexuality, the acquisition of language, and the sense of self necessary for conscious reflection. Lacan locates as a site of this division those language games that signal the infant's entry into the order of language, marking the transition from a world of pure unmediated experience to one of objects ordered by words. Of central importance is the *fort-da* game commented by Freud,<sup>18</sup> in which the child's attempt to master the experience of its mother's absence is expressed in a phonemic opposition, her disappearance and reappearance being symbolized by the absence and presence of a toy reel. In this opposition Lacan locates a necessary condition for symbolization, enabling communication with others: it is only through absence, through loss of the experiential plenitude associated with the maternal body prior to subjection to the paternal order, that representation can occur. Representation, then, is loss, is lack, and with it is initiated the play of desire. Lacan encapsulates these relations in a triplicate series of terms, designating as the Real that unattainable immediacy that eludes the hold of the Symbolic, the order of language and representation, and whose return is conjured, through fantasy and projection, in the Imaginary.

Throughout his texts, Lacan returns to the subject's circling around this fantasy of unity, emphasizing the subject's divided and uncohesive status, its fundamental dependency on the signifier. And its inherent instability, for Lacan stresses that this subject is in process, produced in and through the modalities

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16. Gallop, *Daughter's Seduction*, p. 28.

17. Freud's works on the topic as quoted in Gallop, *Daughter's Seduction*, p. 28, where the author, in a complex play on words, also quotes Lacan on the "excentricity" of desire. My own navigation through these terms is based on hers.

18. The *fort-da* game has been widely commented. This account is based on one by Victor Burgin, who links it to Barthes' citation of the *tuche* or "encounter with the real" in *Camera Lucida*, and shows its relations to the Lacanian terms of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary: "Re-Reading *Camera Lucida*," *Creative Camera*, no. 215 (November 1982): 731.

of language: if it is constituted through the formative stages that underly the acquisition of language, this structuring is not definitive, the subject is constantly formed and re-formed, positioned and re-positioned in every speech act. This flux in the subject has important implications for ideology, which aims to produce the appearance of a unified subject, masking or covering division. And in a manner with significant bearing on the visual arts, Lacan returns repeatedly to the role played by specularity, and to the look as guarantee of imaginary self-coherence.

In looking at an object in the world outside its own body, Annette Kuhn has written, "the subject begins to establish that body as separate from and autonomous of the world outside,"<sup>19</sup> affording the split between subject and object that is the condition for entry into language. But the privileged moment in the process of self-consciousness is the mirror phase, which occurs between the ages of six and eight months, when the infant child perceives its reflection as an independent and cohesive identity, locating itself in an order outside itself, and providing the basis for further identifications. Lacan, however, stresses that the apparent unity is a multiple fiction ("... this form situates the instance of the *ego*, before its social determinations, in a fictional direction..."): on one hand it covers or masks the infant's fragmentation and lack of coordination ("still sunk in his motor capacity and nursling dependency") in the wholeness of an image, just as the very image that places the child cleaves its identity in two, into self and objectified other. And on the other hand, this specular self is conferred only through the mediation of a third term, the mother, an other, whose presence conveys meaning, insuring its reality. Hence the mother "grants" an image to the child in a process of "referring"<sup>20</sup> that erodes the supposed unity of the subject. If the mirror image, in its cohesiveness, provides a model for the ego-function, if it locates the self within language, then it places it in a relation of dependency to an external order, shifting according to placement, lacking fixed identity. The subject is both "excluded from the signifying chain and 'represented' in it."<sup>21</sup> This specular self, then, is the social self; Lacan's human subject, as Juliet Mitchell has written, is not "an entity with an identity"; whatever identity it appears to have is derived only "by identifying with others' perceptions of it."<sup>22</sup> The self is always *like* another.

The mirror stage is important to Lacan because it reveals the fictional nature of the centered, "whole," subject, showing the image of our first recognitions to be a misrecognition, a falsity. Soon language replaces this image, as the signifier assumes ascendancy over the subject, enabling the subject to be represented within the matrix of social communication. Division and loss, as recounted before: primal repression, Monique David-Ménard writes, again

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19. Kuhn, *Women's Pictures*, p. 47.

20. Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, pp. 30-31, contains the clearest elucidation of the role of the mirror stage in the subject's location in language.

21. Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 68.

22. Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 5.

underscores this operation in which "the existential situation, overshadowed by the symbol, falls into oblivion, and with it the subject's truth."<sup>23</sup> But such wholeness persists at the level of fantasy as that truth, or point of certainty to which the subject would appeal to complete its divided status. Lacan designates this site of the subject's demand as the Other, holding it up as a fantasy against the mobility of language as the place of meaning production and against the signifier's rule over the subject. For if the meaning of each unit can only be determined differentially, by reference to another, there can be no ultimate meaning or certainty for the subject. And if sexuality is structured in language there can be, through a similar logic, no fixed sexual identity. Only through a false essentialism can the instability or "difficulty" of sexuality be resolved: only when (as Jacqueline Rose remarks) "the categories male and female are seen to represent an absolute and complementary division . . . [do] they fall prey to a mystification in which the difficulty of sexuality instantly disappears: 'to disguise this gap by relying on the virtue of the "genital," to resolve it through the maturation of tenderness . . . however piously intended, is nonetheless a fraud.' (Lacan, *Meaning of the Phallus*, p. 81)."<sup>24</sup> And it is against this false essentialism, this "spirit" opposed to the "matter" of language, that Lacan's late writings are addressed.

Lacan's last texts return again and again to the question, unanswerable for Freud, of "What does woman want?" And what is most radical, most "desirable" in them for feminist thinking is his insistence on the plurality of positions that crosses language as its constantly produced effect, countering the *conventional opposition used to represent difference*. In this, Lacan is following Freud, who opposed the notion of symmetry in the cultural formation of the sexes, arguing that the place of woman within patriarchy precluded complementarity. The denial of polymorphous sexual urges under Oedipal prohibition insured that the father's dominant place in society could be assumed only by the male, by the cultural heir to its laws. Lacan, however, will go Freud further, "barring" Woman (*la Femme*), declaring her nonexistence, her nonuniversalization within the phallogocentric economy.<sup>25</sup> "There is no woman but is excluded by the order of words which is the order of things . . .," he writes. And throughout these texts he will call fraud the subjection of woman to those laws which construct the subject as masculine, revealing the arbitrariness, the imposture of that position.

Two things are at issue here: one, the unjust accommodation of woman to the masculine standard; the other, the specific role as fantasy she performs in the sustenance of that very arbitrary accord.

Evident in Lacan's writing and before it, in that of Freud, is that the framework for the expression of "sexual complementarity" is masculine.

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23. Monique David-Ménard, "Lacanian Against Lacan," *Social Text*, no. 6 (Fall 1982): 95.

24. Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 33.

25. This best discussion on this "non-existence" of woman, her appropriation to the masculine standard and the phallic "dis-proportion" discussed in the next paragraphs is Gallop's.



Woman is defined (or “derived,” as Stephen Heath terms it)<sup>26</sup> as the difference *from* man, judged against his determining maleness. This definition of woman as not male, as “other,” consists in the renunciation of feminine specificity; it precludes heterogeneity—or true heterosexuality—through homogeneity, the rule of the One.<sup>27</sup> Defined as “negative” through the terms of sexual polarity, woman functions as a category against which masculine privilege attains to presence: it is through her negative place that the value of dominion accrues. And this reduction of plurality to the phallic standard prescribes that woman will never be able to represent her difference but will serve as a mirror for the masculine subject, divesting otherness to the same. This is why, according to Lacan, there can be no “relation” between the sexes, but only “the union of opposites, difference resolved into one,” in the masculine dream of symmetry.

In a manner impossible to Freud, Lacan, with his mooring in language, will attribute this unreasonable privilege of the phallus to its function as a signifier which rules over (produces) the subject. And with the same gesture he will expose the misreading on which that privilege rests. The phallus, he writes, is “the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of a signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier.” In this sense man *as well as* woman is castrated, is partial, as a condition of subjectivity: both are subjected to the same “whole” or standard. As Jane Gallop formulates it, the phallus

*. . . is both the (dis)proportion between the sexes, and the (dis)proportion between any sexed being by virtue of being sexed (having parts, being partial) and human totality. So the man is “castrated” by not being total, just as the woman is “castrated” by not being a man. Whatever relation of lack man feels, lack of wholeness, lack in/of being, is projected onto woman’s lack of phallus, lack of maleness. Woman is then the figuration of phallic “lack”; she is a hole. By these means and extreme phallic proportions, the whole is to man as man is to the hole.*<sup>28</sup>

In the Lacanian system this “ultimate signifier” is the signifier for union underlying desire. Associated with the object lost in primal repression, its privileged image is the phallic mother, the pre-Oedipal mother, “apparently omnipotent” prior to the discovery of her significant lack.<sup>29</sup> It is to this first object that man will return in fantasy, through the displacement of desire along the metonymic chain, attempting to recuperate wholeness, to rediscover plenitude, to disavow his own necessary partiality through projection onto the feminine substitute. Lacan designates this object as *objet a*, in reference to

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26. Heath, *Sexual Fix*, p. 114.

27. Gallop, *Daughter’s Seduction*, p. 66.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

29. *Ibid.*

*l'Autre*, the Other, that point of certainty toward which subjectivity strains. Within the play of desire, then, woman is a fetish—"the filler for the void," as Gallop calls it—used to dam up the absence of the original object. Bridge toward union, toward *denial* of separation, woman is thus employed to comprise the stable, unified masculine subject in disavowal of its constitutive contingency. The relation of man to *objet a* is fantasy: as the projection of lack, woman, writes Rose, functions as a *symptom* for the man.<sup>30</sup>

What Lacan does, in emphasizing the subjection of woman under patriarchal law, is to reveal the dependence of masculine authority on that very negative status. And in demonstrating the arbitrariness of the assumption, based on "seeming" or visible value, he indicates its unfounded nature. For woman can only be negatively defined, elevated to truth and made to support the onus of masculine fantasy when the terms of sexual identity become fixed by that very rigid opposition. As such, she becomes the mystified object, the mythical Other, an essence opposed to the material product of language. However, given the arbitrary construction of sexual identity, given the intersubjective network on which it rests, and given the inability of the phallus to all, any speaking being, regardless of sex, is entitled to assume the phallus,<sup>31</sup> to position itself on either side of its divide. As a subject in process, in language, woman is at liberty to counter anatomy and with it, the claims of essential femininity, freeing her self from the fixed terms of identity by recognition of its textual production. And it is against this mobility that Lacan "places" the hypostasis of Western phallogocentric culture, with its enshackling, oppressive "effects," and calls it fraud.

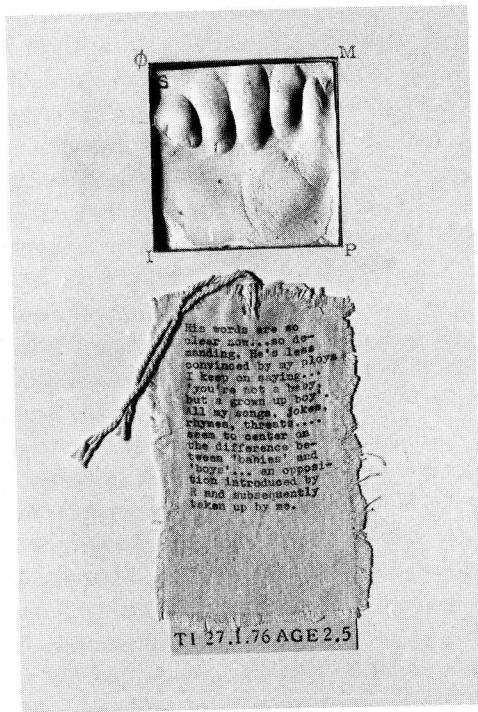
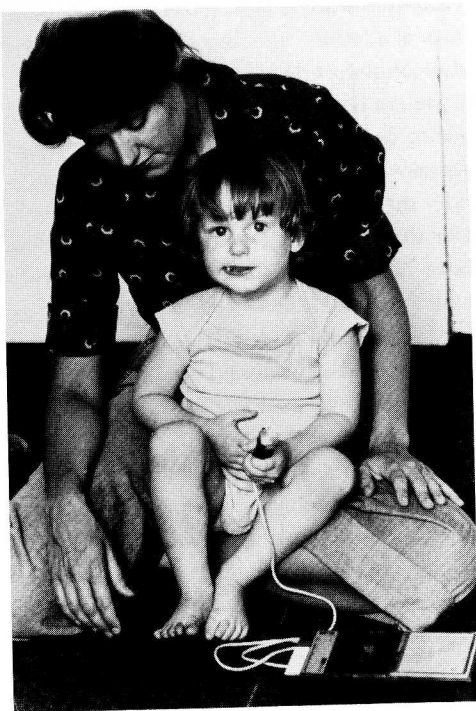
Lacan's project has been taken by many artists as an injunction to "dephallicize," to assume the phallus critically so as to erode its powers, revealing the arbitrary privilege on which they rest. This practice is based on the assumption of a theoretical position classically denied to women in Western society; it should be noted, however, that a number of its practitioners are men aware of the role of their own sexuality in the relations between representation and power. The following four artists are only several of those engaged in examining purposefully hidden areas within the field of subjectivity.

Central for its theoretical breadth, textual complexity and thoroughness of analysis is Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79), a six-section, 135-part multimedia record of the first six years in the mother-child relationship. Taking as its material the artist's own son, the work begins with the infant's birth and ends with inscription into the human order, tracing the formation of language, selfhood, and sexual positioning as defined by patriarchal society. In its ordered arrangements of feeding charts and diapers, of baby vests, diaries, and imprints of words, the *Document* could be regarded as a simple, if obsessive, record of child development. However, Kelly's theoretical notes and the place accorded to maternal fantasies install it in another context,

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30. Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 48.

31. On the "assumption" of the phallus, or "de-phallicization" as an imperative for feminists, see Gallop, *Daughter's Seduction*, Chapter 8.



(Top left) Mary Kelly and son, Kelly Barrie, in recording session for *Post-Partum Document, Documentation II*, 1975. (Photo: Ray Barrie); (Top right) Mary Kelly. *Documentation IV* (detail), 1975, from *Post-Partum Document*. Plaster mold, cloth, paper, one of eight units, each: 14 x 11" (35.6 x 27.9 cm). Kunsthau, Zurich; (Bottom) Mary Kelly. *Documentation VI* (detail), 1979, from *Post-Partum Document*. Etched slate and resin, two of fifteen units, each: 10 x 8" (20.3 x 25.4 cm). Arts Council of Great Britain

arguing for motherhood as a specific *moment* of femininity constructed within social processes.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the six parts the associations of mother and child, their social and psychical positioning, shift across the structure of their relationship in reciprocal patterns according to internal and external factors. Hence the separate stages of the *Document* map the constitution of feminine identity through moments in the development of the child; just as the child is seen as socially formed, as positioned within the human network through decisive processes of language acquisition, so Kelly's treatment of her self suggests that feminine subjectivity cannot be viewed outside the intersubjective framework of its formation.

Kelly's decision to employ no direct representations of the female body serves a dual purpose: on one hand, it provides a protest against the body's use as an object, and against its appropriation to the sexist doctrine of essential femininity. And on the other, it acts to locate femininity within the field of desire, played out across a series of psychic investments. The myriad verbal and visual representations—the animal specimens and comforter fragments, the foot molds, baby vests, and samples of childish scrawl—function as emblems of the mother's desire; in conjunction with the analytic discourse, they trace and elucidate the shifting flow of plenitude, parturition, and loss that comprises the maternal relation to the child.

Indeed, the *Document* locates maternal femininity in the narcissistic pleasure of identification with the child, an identification which, through the phallus, serves to supplement her negative place. The experience of "having the phallus" pertains to the Imaginary, resulting from the mis-recognition of the child as belonging to the mother's body. This fantasy of union is ruptured by the ultimate necessity of division, required both by the processes of the child's maturation and by the Oedipal prohibition of the Father and the Law. Thus there is instability in the relationship—and difficulty, occasioned by the mother's inability to accept the child as a "whole," as a-part from, rather than part of, herself. To the mother the child's loss represents the relinquishment of plenitude, and the reaffirmation of her own lack, for which she will aim to compensate by substituting, for the Imaginary object, varied emblems of desire.

In a cryptogram of maternal femininity, Kelly rewrites Lacan's diagram  $\frac{S}{s}$  as  $\frac{\text{What do you want?}}{s}$ , installing the mother in the position of the Other who is privileged to answer the child's demands. As she remarks in her annotations, this formula is an unconscious symptom of the mother's desire to remain the Omnipotent Other of the pre-Oedipal period; dependency to the Signifier is gradually relinquished in the first three sections of the *Document*

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32. Informative analyses of Kelly's project are provided in an interview with Paul Smith, *Parachute*, no. 26 (Spring 1982): 31-35; Margaret Iverson, "The Bride Stripped Bare by her Own Desire: Reading Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document," *Discourse*, no. 4 (1981-82): 75-88; and, in particular, Elizabeth Cowie, "Introduction to the Post-Partum Document," *m/f*, nos. 5-6 (1981): 115-123.

which rehearse postpartum separation as described by Lacan.<sup>33</sup> Weaning from the breast, for example, is documented in the Analyzed Fecal Stains, which measure the gradual ingestion of solid food. Part II traverses weaning from the holophrase, in which early, intersubjective, inherently dependent discourse, where the mother completes and interprets the child's single-word utterances, cedes to the formation of independent patterned speech. Physical separation (weaning from the dyad) is documented in Part III, first through the father's intervention, then as the child begins nursery school, leaving the mother on a daily basis. The three parts imply an interrelated sequence of divisions spanning sexuality, representation, and language. Weaning from the holophrase, for example, culminates in the child's recorded full-sentence utterance, "See the Baby (looking in the mirror)," marking the end of his imaginary identification with his mother. As Margaret Iverson has noted, the formation of an independent ego in this phase entails a triple series of identifications with another—with the mirror phase, with another's language, and with the father, expressed in the (male) child's desire to occupy his father's place.<sup>34</sup> All of these signs mark the child's differentiation. All can be perceived as threats to the narcissistic identification of the mother.

The remaining Documentations encompass the progressive externalization of the child and the reciprocal loss, and sublimation of loss, by the other. The process culminates in Part VI which records the child's efforts to read and write, and ends with his writing his own name, designating both his acquisition of language and his awareness of his place within the symbolic order. In this final part mother and child receive their definitive positions in a framework of social rather than psychic relations, a framework marked by wholeness and definitive loss. According to Lacan, the maternal situation consists in a reactivation of the childhood experience of castration; it is a phasal replay of the feminine passage through the Oedipal moment, and through the recognition of her negative position. Hence Kelly's work demonstrates the psychic shifts across language and representation that determine subjectivity, defeating the fixity of identity. But what is most important in this process is what the *Document* brings to bear on the nature and function of representation.

According to psychoanalytic theory, the fetish is a substitutive object, employed to disavow and, in so doing, acknowledge the fact of woman's castration. Normally conceived as a masculine practice, fetishism is figured here as a feminine project, for the hand molds, scraps of comforters, and word imprints represent an attempt to disavow, through psychic investments, the loss of the child-as-phallus. The substitutive objects intervene as an effort to suture that loss, to bind up, or psychologically allay, the anxiety of castration. Yet Kelly places this practice in a larger context, arguing for the fetishistic nature of *all* representation, based in the inevitable division between subject and object. And since it is across such representations that child and mother come to be placed, the latter in her definitive situation of lack, so the *Document*

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33. See Iverson, "Bride Stripped Bare," pp. 81-84.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 81.



presents an analogue to the processes of representation by which the individual subject is socially positioned.<sup>35</sup> Although the early Documents describe the psychical positioning of the mother across family relations, showing their grounding in the unconscious structure of fantasy, the footnotes to Part VI describe her construction across social institutions and discourses—across bad schools, housing, problems of economy and health that define her responsibilities as mother. Implicit in Kelly's remarkably contained analytic work is an argument for the social construction of subjectivity in a striking indictment of essential femininity.

Kelly's practice must be located in the Women's Movement's history, and in the particular moment in the mid-seventies when British feminists turned to psychoanalysis. In a similar manner, Victor Burgin's work has been historically formed, both by conceptualist and postconceptualist practices and by discussions, centered around British cinematic journals, into the place of the individual subject in representation. Although Burgin had been involved during the mid-seventies in a critique of class relations and ideological structures, that activity has more recently been "displaced" to the terrain of sexuality and to an examination of the relations between sexuality and power.<sup>36</sup> His project entails an extended analysis, constructed across the signifying practice of photography, of the role of psychic structures in the formation of daily reality, and of the particular part played by photography as a central ideological apparatus. Two elements are important to this study: one, the degree to which the detours of memory, fantasy, and other primary process operations infiltrate the process of looking, defining its discursive dimension; the other, the way the photographic apparatus itself reflects unconscious structures of fascination, constructing and reinforcing the subject in a masculine position. Implicit in this practice, then, is a contestation of the neutrality of representation, an exposure of the extent to which the "male-coded voice of sexual oppression [is] the archetype of all oppressive discourses"<sup>37</sup> inscribed in the dominant signifying practice of our society.

Indeed, Burgin's practice is directed against a conception, inherently formalist in nature, which would conceive of photography as a "purely visual" medium, and of the photograph as a transparent reflection of its subject. This notion provides the framework of photographic neutrality, based in the adequation of image and meaning; it is countered, here, by the image conceived as a discursive form whose "reading" emits, intervenes and variously engages psychic, social, and institutional "texts." Supporting this approach is attention to the production of meaning and to the relation of photography to language: ". . . even when one looks at a photograph with no writing on or alongside it," Burgin notes in a recently published interview, "a text always intrudes—in a fragmentary form, in the mind, in association. Mental processes exchange

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35. See Cowie, "Introduction to the Post-Partum Document," pp. 120-122.

36. Claude Gintz, essay on Burgin's *Gradiva*, unpublished.

37. Tony Godfrey, "Sex, Text, Politics: An Interview with Victor Burgin," *Block*, no. 7 (1982): 15.



images for words and words for images . . . ,<sup>38</sup> engaging with latent registers of fantasy to amplify and transform the “visual form.” Photographs are apprehended *through* language, either through the radical operations by which we “make sense” of images, or through more complicated unconscious trajectories that inevitably establish contact. This “scripto-visual” nature defines the photograph in its social use,<sup>39</sup> outside of the visual or formal constraints that characterize its artistic practice. And what this indicates is that meaning cannot be located within the image, as a preexisting or expressed characteristic, but is continually displaced to an intertextual fabric whose elaborations parallel the mechanisms of dreams.

Freud described the dream as a rebus, in which the operations of condensation and displacement, of considerations of representation and secondary revision insured that visual elements could be deciphered for their inscribed unconscious forms. From the laconic structure of the manifest elements unfold chains of association and fluxive references which “. . . spread out . . . into the intricate network of our world of thought: consciousness, subliminal reverie, preconscious thought, the unconscious—the way of phantasy” (Burgin, from one of his texts). It is in this context that Burgin employs black-and-white images, stressing the photograph as a text to be read, and places image and superposed copy in a shifting or ex-centric relation. This skewed relation is both informed by, and critical of, the use of photographs in advertising and media, where the verbal text serves to fix or regulate meaning, producing the image as reality *for* the subject. The direct, redundant relation between image and text situates the reader in a passive, rather than active, relationship, as consumer—not producer—of meaning. This confirmation and reinforcement of subject positions has made photography a prime instrument of ideology, working to enforce the order of dominance. The evasive, intrinsically disjunctive structure of Burgin’s texts works to engage the very intertextuality productive of meaning, enjoining the reader to intervene actively in the work.

Negating the fixed, self-sufficient object which is the photographic image, Burgin also places under denial its complement, the transcendent subject. And with it, the author: “. . . it is the component meanings of this [intricate psychic] network that an image must *re-present*, reactivate and reinforce, . . . it is the pre-constituted field of discourse which is the substantial ‘author’ here, photograph and photographer alike are its products; and, in the act of seeing, so is the viewer.”<sup>40</sup> Meaning and the subject are produced through representation, as a function of textual operations: we are returned to the now-familiar theme of the subject as *effect* of the signifier.

Consideration of the construction of this subject, however, must address the complicity in the process of the system of representation itself. The suturing

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38. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

39. Quotations and descriptive framework (in particular, Burgin’s involvement in Freudian theory) in the following paragraphs are taken from interviews and critical essays, in particular those in Burgin, *Thinking Photography*.

40. Burgin, “Photography, Phantasy, Function,” in *Thinking Photography*, pp. 206-207.

activity by which the subject is bound in to the discourse in a moment of identification is always inherent in the technical system as a precondition of its efficacy. And Burgin's project interrogates both the means by which the discourse of photography and its representational apparatus, the camera, construct the subject, and the specific form of subjectivity composed. A cursory glance reveals this to be the singular, unified, centered subject of humanist discourse, which is placed in a position of mastery or control over the depicted scene. Based on the *camera obscura* of the Renaissance, photographic representation implies both a framed scene or object and a controlling point of view: through a "systematic deception," the single-point perspective in the lens ". . . arranges all information according to the laws of projection which place the subject as geometric point of origin of the scene in an *imaginary relationship with real space . . .*" (italics mine). The scene both radiates from and returns to this controlling position, occupied by the camera and conferred, in looking, on the viewer. It is the medium's putative transparency that bestows the illusion of naturalness, effacing the image's fabrication under guise of objectivity. Hence Burgin can state that "the perspectival system of representation represents, before all else, a *look*,"<sup>41</sup> implying subject and objectified other.

As with the viewer's relation to this object, so his relation to ideology is similarly prescribed. For this subject, as a historical production, is intimately bound up with the ideology and development of capitalism. The sense of controlling individuality, of the subject who masters through technological, legal, and social apparatuses, informs the capitalist approach to nature and after it, to humanity. And, hence, it is not surprising to find this perspectival system inscribed within those very reproductive apparatuses—photography and the cinema—which coincide with and support the ideology of capitalism. As Laura Mulvey observes, the camera is a means to produce the "illusion of Renaissance space," thus subjecting it to the controlling male gaze and to "an ideology of representation that revolves around the perception of the subject."<sup>42</sup> But the clue to this efficacy, to the social predominance of objectifying modes of mastery, is to be found far earlier in psychic structures of fascination.

Looking, Freud tells us, is not indifferent; it is always implicated in a system of control. Freud designated the sexual pleasures of looking as an independent drive, scopophilia, which assumed both active and passive forms. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he noted their coexistence and alternation in children, as well as the social predominance of one. Thus voyeurism denotes a pleasure in positioning oneself against another—in submitting the other to a distanced and controlling gaze—while the desire to be both object and subject of the gaze characterizes exhibitionism. What constitutes, or differentiates, the drive is the way the subject positions itself within its circuit. These psychic implications are elaborated in Lacan's discussion of the scopical, in which he distinguishes between the narcissistic movement of the mirror phase, con-

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41. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

42. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 18. Mulvey's essay remains the central source for the analysis of the structures of fascination in film. [Reprinted in this volume, pp. 361-373.]

sisting of erotic investment in one's unified image, and the inherently sadistic drive of the voyeur. However, the two are conjoined in their imaginary or imagistic function of fending off lack through the investment of self-coherence; in this they can be seen to confirm an inherently fetishistic role.

The social shaping of the scopis is manifest in the regimes of specularly enforced through ideology; one can note, for example, the narcissistic investments of consumption, which invoke an ideal self-image through acquisition of objects, and exploit the specular brilliance of photographic surfaces to the structural fascination of the mirror. And one can also note, on the other hand, the ideology of the spectacle as authorized by the dominant order, in which one part of society represents itself to the other, reinforcing class domination.<sup>43</sup> According to the division of labor in society, it is women who assume this position of "otherness"; the structures of seeing and being seen, with their implications of ego preservation and gratification, become aligned with sexual difference. Their construction in and through representation is documented in studies of the cinema, in which the masculine look inscribed through stars and stereotypes, the dyad of silent woman and active male, articulates woman as spectacle, as image, as *writing* of masculine desire. Yet their compass is immeasurably broader. Through advertising and fashion photography, through photojournalism, the institutions of art and the prescriptions of social decorum is woven an insistent pattern, the cultural inscription of subject positions. Writes John Berger, describing the im-position of the masculine gaze, "*Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.*"<sup>44</sup> This eviction of the female spectator has parallels in the exclusion of woman from language. Across the social screen, then, is constructed a series of repetitions, between subject and object and surveyor and surveyed, between power and oppression and speaker and spoken.

Burgin's awareness of the camera's complicity in this negative representation of woman is evident in *Olympia* (1982), one of whose images repeats, in an internal play, Lacan's famous diagram on the social designation of difference. Of the two sexually scored bathroom doors, the women's has been opened to expose the photographer with camera reflected in a mirror, conferring on the photographic apparatus the attributes of voyeurism. The specular brilliance of the mirror plays with the narcissistic potential inherent in photographs, just as its framing repeats their authorizing function; the opened door indicates woman's openness, in patriarchal society, to penetration and subjection by the masculine gaze. A series of references articulates this position in literature and painting: in one, Burgin appropriates a detail from Manet's *Olympia*, indicating the use of the female nude as an object to be surveyed and possessed; in another, allusion is made to the mechanical doll and voyeur in Hoffmann's *The Sand-Man*, as discussed by Freud. What *Olympia* addresses, then, is the role played by woman, under phallogocentric order and through its technical apparatuses, in insuring masculine unity.

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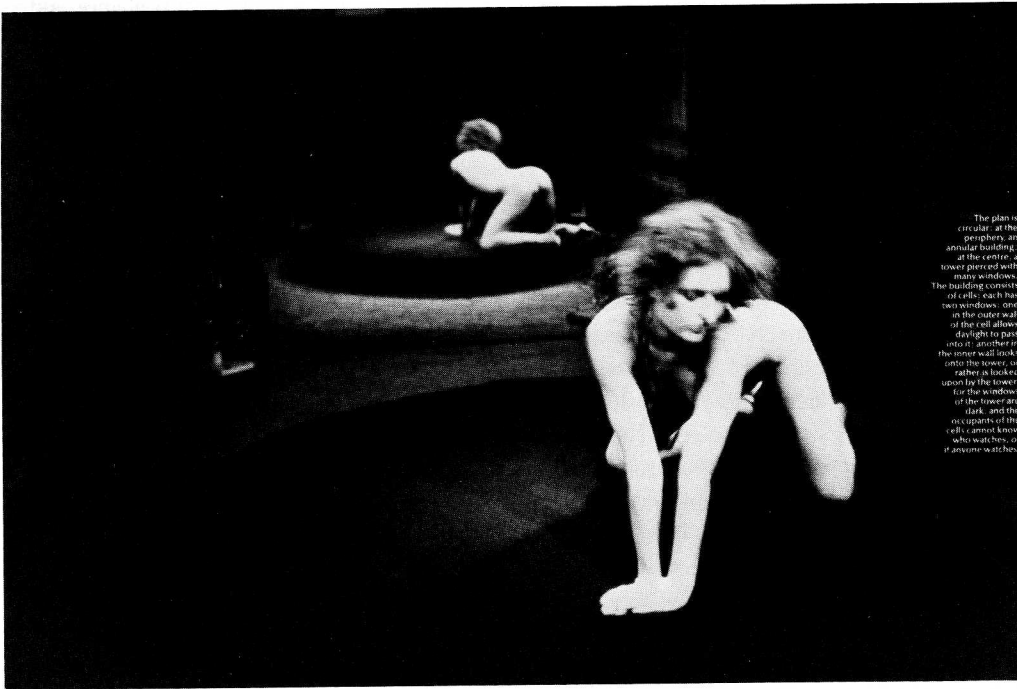
43. See Kuhn, *Women's Pictures*.

44. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 47.

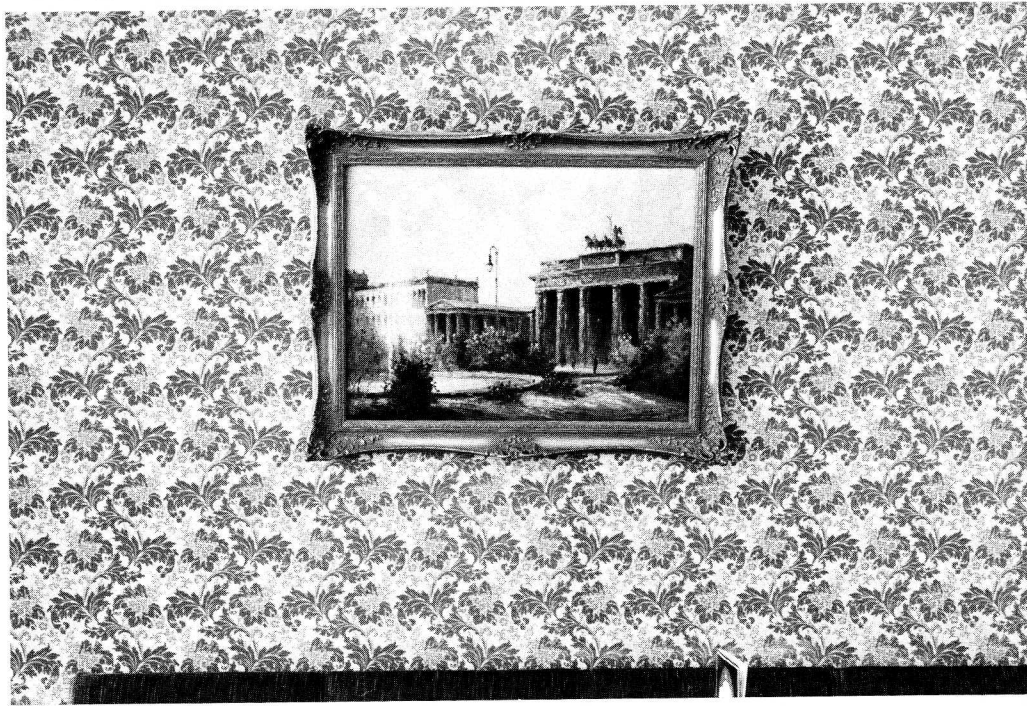
Burgin has played elsewhere on this equation between surveillance and the voyeur's sadistic drive. In *Grenoble* (1981), the photographed text in one image describes this subjection, as well as woman's masochistic assumption of the masculine position: ". . . in the large factories the seamstresses were under surveillance. The *forewoman* and the noise permitted neither singing nor conversation" (italics mine). A earlier series, *Zoo 78*, employs this vigilance over women as "the most visible, socially sanctioned form of the more covert surveillance of society-in-general by the agencies of the state." Schlovski's *Zoo, or letters not about love*, written in Berlin in the twenties, supplies the textual reference for these works which superpose the current, divided Berlin on the sexually charged, prewar city. Both titles evoke Berlin's central urban section, called "Zoo" for *Zoologischer Garten*, an area now surrounded by the red-light, peepshow district and tangential to the Wall, an edifice punctuated by surveillance slits. The left photograph in *Zoo IV* cites/sights a naked woman on a revolving stage, surrounded by surveillance booths, while the superposed text refers to Foucault's description of a Panopticon prison. In this way Burgin addresses the mastering, sexually gratifying implications of the look, "framing" woman, its central object under capitalism, as the archetype of (masculine) oppression. However, the look's role within the circulation of desire is also addressed in the right photograph depicting a framed painting of the Brandenburg Gate, the symbol of prewar, undivided Berlin. As an image powerfully inscribed in the popular imaginary, the Gate serves as a lost object; hence its image functions as a fetish, acting to commemorate, and disavow, political division. Burgin's plays on framing link this fantasy of completion to its sexual complement, for the apertures of booth and wall, the keyhole perspectives, and repeated internal elements establish woman and gate as serving similar roles in sexuality and politics. Through a process of analogy, then, Burgin designates woman as object of desire, a fantasy object acting to close the rent, to complete the lack of masculine subjectivity.

Silvia Kolbowski also deals with the cultural production of subject positions. Her appropriations and manipulations of media images, largely drawn from fashion photography, foreground, in a critical reading, the daily construction and reinforcement of sexuality through society's sexual "models." The supposed immediacy of the image—its "naturalness" or "real-seemingness"—is countered by the mediating strategies underlying it, which point towards the mediations of ideology and unconscious psychic structures. Constructed across sequences of discrete, but related photographs, Kolbowski's plays with images are the analogues of verbal play, showing a common foundation in language, a common subjection to its arbitrary laws.

The feminine body, as seen throughout this work, is never neutral, never natural; it is always marked out, claimed, and figured with language, always inscribed in a system of difference as defined by the dominant masculine order. In the first of a series fragmenting the female body (*Model Pleasure*), Kolbowski frames the issue of positionality within the context of looking, showing woman as subject to the controlling masculine gaze. Woman is shown, as Lacan has written, to be "inscribed in an order of exchange of which she is the object," an order that "literally submits her"; the connection of the figure



The plan is circular, at the periphery, an annular building, at the centre, a tower pierced with many windows. The building consists of cells: each has two windows, one in the outer wall of the cell allows daylight to pass into it; another in the inner wall looks onto the tower, or rather is looked upon by the tower, for the windows of the tower are dark, and the occupants of the cells cannot know who watches, or if anyone watches.



Victor Burgin. *Zoo 78*, 1978. Black-and-white photographs on boards, two panels, each: 29 x 38" (73.7 x 97.5 cm). (Photos: courtesy the artist)



of woman with the condition of being-looked-at thus serves as an index of the unavailability of subjectivity to woman. Different fashion photographs, repositioned within this analytic context, demonstrate the common, naturalized, representational reinforcement of a constructed sexual condition. Five of seven are images of woman veiled, one behind venetian blinds, the others behind delicate tracteries of net. This scoring or mapping of the feminine face defines its surface as a site of ideological operations, while the grate-like, window quality of the veil draws attention to the condition of object of the gaze. This definition of woman within the compass of masculine specularity is made explicit in a single shot of a man staring at a woman, her own vision occluded (veiled) by dark glasses. That woman can receive but not return the look—that she is its bearer rather than its origin—is evident in the way her veiled eyes are directed outside the frame, are cut by it or, in the sixth image, are entirely shut, denoting the mystification of woman by man. The frame here signifies the authority of the other, performing the function of insuring masculine coherence. And the dominance of the one position is reasserted in the seventh and final image, in which a male hand brushes a woman's veiled and smiling mouth, inverted to shape an analogy between the feminine gaze and the woman spoken. Inherent in Kolbowski's work, then, is that woman within the patriarchal order does not speak but is variously looked at, imaged, and objectified,<sup>45</sup> serving as a signifier for *her* other. However, Kolbowski also implies that this voyeurism is transformed, in the case of the female viewer of fashion photography, into narcissism, as the viewer identifies with the object of the gaze to mirror the constitutive narcissism of feminine sexuality.

Kolbowski has dealt elsewhere with this desire to become "the image which captures the male gaze."<sup>46</sup> In an untitled sequence from 1983, again drawn from fashion magazines, views of women redoubled in mirrors are intercut with images of figured sexual division. That such splitting in the subject is executed in the shadow of the masculine ego is evident from the male hands, shadows, or feet (the classic substitute for the penis) that occupy the peripheries of the frame. A single photograph, repeated but sequentially elided, displays, in the third image, a division between void and masculine shadow and, in the fifth, the shadow counterposed to a woman's face, her eyes cast down and closed. That Kolbowski is dealing with the *cultural* implacement of woman, which assigns her to a "submitted" position, is apparent from the first and final images showing woman marked, verbally defined or otherwise externally scored by the masculine term.

Lacan defined woman's relation to the phallic term (and with it, to sexuality in general) as masquerade: the very process which, by constructing femininity in reference to the masculine sign, insured its nonidentity, impelled a corresponding effort to cover or *disguise* that fundamental lack. In this

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45. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Stolen Image and Its Uses," essay for exhibition, Syracuse, New York, 1983.

46. Reference by Kolbowski to critical work by Mary Ann Doane on female spectatorship.



manner, we are told in *The Meaning of the Phallus*, "... the intervention of an 'appearing' . . . gets substituted for the 'having' so as to protect it on one side and to mask its lack on the other, with the effect that the ideal or typical manifestations of behavior in both sexes . . . are entirely propelled into comedy." Woman's desire to be the phallus, the signifier of the other's desire, leads her to "take refuge in this mask" with the "strange consequence" that "virile display itself appears as feminine." Hence the flaunting or foregrounding of femininity involved in dressing up or "disguising" oneself as object of the masculine gaze evokes, through covering, the constitutive absence of woman in the patriarchal order.

The implications of masquerade as a representation of male desire can be grasped in Kolbowski's third work on partial objects, *The Everything Chain* (1982). In this three-part sequence of photographs encompassing, but not confined to, imagery of the foot, Kolbowski deals with the way the feminine subject will "fit herself up" (*s'appareiller*) through reference to that "with which bodies may be paired off" (*s'appairer*).<sup>47</sup> Lacan's pun, playing between appearance, apparatus, and the pairing function underlying differentiation underlies the first panel of the triptych in which a series of female parts—two feet, a neck, a hand—are decorated, disguised, or generally "feminized" by a looping chain. The range of body parts indicates the range of substitutive objects through which desire, in its narcissistic investment, circulates, as well as the origin of desire in the (eternally absent) masculine sign. Implicit in this panel, then, is the manner in which meaning is fixed or erected in the order of the symbolic. But in the third panel this "ordering" of sexuality is contrasted to its perpetual instability or slippage in the unconscious—to the simultaneous movement within language away from such positions of coherence that Lacan designates as *significance*. A sequence of fashion photographs shows high-heeled feet sliding, elided under the hem of a dress, or precariously slipping in the street, in the shadow of masculine feet. Hence Kolbowski's two panels can be seen to expose the double and "difficult" dimension of sexuality within language—its construction and reinforcement on the one hand, and its continual evanescence on the other.

That desire is always masculine, operating through a sequence of metonymic displacements, is manifest in the central panel: just as desire moves along the chain of signifiers from hand to neck to foot as substitutive objects, so it traces a course from "cast" leg to "carved" leg to that which ultimately "craved." These objects are only stand-ins, signifiers for the ultimate signifier, the phallus, which, as Lacan states, "can play its role when veiled," when displaced from its original aim. A letter in the lower left corner turns on the impression of veiled meaning: "There was something she carved craved; something which cost cast its spill spell upon me, while it still remained remained unscene unseen . . ." Turning on the phallus, the letter phrases the discourse of the hysteric who, in refuting the fixity of difference, oscillates between masculine and feminine positions, threatening, through her heterogeneity, the

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47. See discussion by Joan Copjec on Lacan's pun in "The Anxiety of the Influencing Machine," *October*, no. 23 (Winter 1982): 48-49.

homogeneous phallogocentric order. She speaks through her body/language of the phallus which "casts" its spell, but only at the cost of feminine specificity, and at the sacrifice of satisfaction; of that which, in its "unseen" or veiled activity, serves to violate or maim woman, excluded (barred) under phallogocentric doctrine. And she also speaks of the privileging through vision of the masculine order, of the "seen" over unseene genitalia, which defines woman as a hole, not whole, lacking. That the discourse is a feminine one, articulated from a position of instability, is apparent from the image of a woman reading a letter in the third (or unstable) panel. But it can also be viewed as a repetition of Lacan's injunction to attend to the materiality of discourse—to the "letter" rather than to the "spirit"—avoiding the fixed oppositions of essential sexuality. Hence Kolbowski's sequence phrases an injunction to women to affront the representational strategies that construct sexuality, constituting woman as a set of meanings, and the violence thereby incurred.

Barbara Kruger also aims to dephallicize, revealing the obscene privilege of masculine authority. Her large black-and-white photographic works, based on posters, billboards, and varied tabloid media images, employ graphic and social conventions against themselves to unmask the patriarchal structure supporting oppression. Implicit are plays on the codes at work in both mass communication and social constructions, so as to rupture what has been naturalized, through photography, as a stable meaning, a truth. The accusative tone of the superposed texts works to erode the modes of identification established by dominant discourse, challenging its construction of the unitary masculine subject and permitting a repositioning of feminine subjectivity. Hence Kruger's project can be seen to pertain to a common attack on those institutionalized conventions that advance masculine subjectivity as the only available position, working to control women's sexuality by reducing it to patriarchal patterns.

A brief description is in order. All of Kruger's works employ images appropriated from varied media sources which have been cropped and enlarged to often threatening proportions. Their black/white, generally planar quality accentuates their function as texts to be read, defining, in a manner similar to Burgin's, the linguistic nature of representation. The images show women "displayed" according to the clichéd conventions of popular representation—as icon, as spectacle or prose, as the "silent stereotypical figure that settles the male gaze."<sup>48</sup> Woman is figured here as constructed by the social "other"; what is inherent in these supine or static forms, often glamorized according to "fashion femininity," is the fetishization of woman to allay castration, and the role of masculine fantasies in forming a feminine ideal. Texts superposed on images articulate, in boldface type, a feminine injunction, opposing a female "we" to a male "you" (i.e., "we won't play nature to your culture," "you construct the category of missing persons," "your gaze hits the side of my face"), and working to disrupt the masculine pleasures of voyeurism. Red frames surround the graphic perimeters, acting as ingratiating devices

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48. Barbara Kruger, "Virtue and Vice on 65th Street," *Artforum* 21, no. 5 (January 1983): 66.

to lure the spectator into the pointedly problematic depths, and to frame the terrain of the authorized (or unauthorized) image. Implicit in these formal devices, then, is a larger strategic "design" at once to construct, deconstruct, and subvert the positionality of woman under patriarchy.

Kruger's use of stereotypes is aimed at exposing the practices by which ideology fixes the production of meaning, reducing its plurality to a limited number of signifieds which are equated with truth within the social economy. That this process is partisan, reflecting the interests of patriarchal society, is evident in the way these images direct and reinforce behavior; in this sense, Kruger would argue that this gender-specific relation to language is patriarchy's main controlling structure, performing the function (as Freud had said) of getting woman into place. The works are all structured by binomial oppositions—by we vs. you, nature vs. culture, passive vs. active, supine vs. standing—repeating, so as to rupture, those operations which construct the woman as other.

The media's slick naturalizing effect is joined here to the specular lures of the photograph as guarantee of self-coherence, of masculine identification. However, Kruger's critique of signifying conventions is specifically informed by cinematic theory. In cinema, the two main instances of controlling perspective are voyeurism and the narrator's authoritative voice. It is the male voice-over that affords the conventional vantage on spectacle, a position occupied in advertising by the masculine-phrased text, or by the female rehearsing the male perspective. Language serves to regulate the viewer's position through the disembodied stance of authority or knowledge, much as it serves to anchor and stabilize meaning, binding image to text. And Kruger's use of the female voice is primed by the absence in cinema (and, with it, in other media) of the female voice that analyzes, reflects, or assumes an active relation to the narrative. The assertive, assaultive tone in her work counters the sham transparency of the masculine code. The disparity between text and the masculine phrasing of the image acts to fissure the process of identification, driving a wedge between image and referent and defeating the closure of meaning. A refusal of suture, then, which opens points of intrusion within dominant ideology; which works to unmoor the unity of the masculine perspective, leading to the proliferation of meanings, none of them subjectively centered. And within the gap between image and text, between illusioned object and assaultive, contradictory voice, is cleared a space for the participation of a feminine subjectivity long denied by its subjected status.

What Kruger's disjunctive practices produce, within the register of sexuality, is an analogue of the Brechtian "noticing of the knots." The means of representation are foregrounded and disrupted so as to defeat the signifier's naturalized illusion, and to reveal the specific interests on which its authority and power rest. However, Kruger's use of literal language indicates her attention to the social construction of *all* identity. Her pronominal manipulations demonstrate that there is no basic self<sup>49</sup> or fixed identity, but only a construc-

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49. See Jane Weinstock, "A Lass, A Laugh and a Lad," *Art in America* 71, no. 6 (Summer 1983): 9.

tion in process. "Position" is an effect of language, produced in an intersubjective network—through the determinations that put "me" against "you," "us" against "them," or construct a self in relation to another. These oscillations indicate the evanescence of the subject, its continuous repositioning and restructuring in the process of signification. What they point to, in Kruger's and in other artists' work, is the subject's mobility within those myriad representations, based on but not identical to language, which comprise our putative reality. And in that mobility lies the prospect of a counterlanguage, aimed against language's shackling rigidification.



Barbara Kruger.  
*We Are Your  
Circumstantial  
Evidence*, 1984.  
Photomontage, 72 x  
48" (183 x 122 cm).  
(Photo: courtesy the  
artist)